"Where is headquarters?" I asked them.

"This is where it was last night," an old man replied. "But the nest is empty. They flew away, the blackbirds."

"Were there many of them?"

"A hundred or so Cossacks. They left at dawn, ahead of the generals. The officers said they expected to make forty miles before night."

We drove back to Luga and wired to Chkheidze: "The highway to Pskov is open. Kornilov's troops are retreating. We are proceeding to Pskov."

Farther on we overtook a motorcyclist with a Cossack hat and a black leather jacket. He was leisurely examining his cycle, which was turned upside down in the ditch. I stopped the car, went up to the Cossack, showed him my credentials and asked, "What is your unit and what are you doing here?"

He replied readily, "Sergeant of the Scout Detail, second regiment of the Ussury Cossack Division, Third Cavalry Corps. Carrying a message from the division chief, General Gubin, to the commander of the corps."

"Give me the message!" I ordered. The Cossack looked at me with a shrewd smile, pulled off his hat, took out an oblong yellow envelope, and handed it to me. "We Cossacks are always ready to oblige, Mr. Commissar," he remarked.

The division chief was reporting to the corps commander that his trains with men, horses, light batteries, and equipment had reached the station of Yamburg. There rumors spread among the Cossacks that they were being sent against the people of Petrograd. The Cossacks asked the officers what the purpose of the expedition was, but the officers themselves knew nothing. The division chief asked for instructions from the corps commander and concluded: "The state of the division is such that I am compelled to unload everything and billet the regiments in surrounding villages."

I returned the message to the Cossack after writing under the signature of General Gubin: "The envelope has been opened and the message read. Commissar Woytinsky." The messenger asked me with a sly smile, "Something urgent? Or some nonsense that can wait till I tune up the cycle?"

"Very urgent. Step on the gas, son." He disappeared in a cloud of dust.

The message was indeed urgent. The Ussury Division was the largest unit in the corps. Without it, the corps had ceased to exist. The appeals of the Executive Committee had reached the Cossacks.

Billeted around Yamburg, the men realized they had been sent against the Soviets. They arrested their officers, appointed commanders from their own ranks, and sent a delegation to the Smolny